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ABSTRACT

A pilot study involving 55 Canadian university students demonstrated the value of administering an attitude inventory and a needs assessment instrument to adult students before attempting to teach them basic literacy skills. In addition to designing and piloting the two instruments, the purposes of the study included comparing expressed attitudes and habits with perceived behavior and deficiencies: analyzing different responses on the basis of age, sex, academic training, and major teaching area: and providing aid to the teacher in modifying materials, teaching techniques, and learning environments. The pilot study was effective in producing usable data as well as in suggesting refinements and clarified the differences between the characteristics of the adult learner and the child. (The two instruments developed for the study are appended.) (AEA)

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National Reading Conference, 1979

Symposium on Fitting Learning Processes and Materials to the Needs of the Adult Student

THE USE OF AN ATTITUDE INVENTORY AND A NEEDS ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT IN TEACHING THE ADULT STUDENT

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Table of Contents

	Page
I. Abstract	1
Purposes	1
II. Review of Literature	2-3
III. Methodology	4
A. Subjects	4
B. Procedures	4
IV. Results	5-8
General	5
A. Demographic data	5
B. Needs - assessment of reading skills	5-7
C. Semantic - Differential Attitude Inventory	7
D. Comparison between and within instruments	7-8
V. Implications	9-12
A. Implications for Refinement	9
1/ Semantic Differential for Attitudes to Reading	
2/ Needs assessment for Reading Skills	
B. Implications for Teaching	9-12
1/ Instructional strategies	
2/ Learning Environment	
3/ Materials	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	13-15
APPENDICES	16-20

List of Tables

1. Rank Order - Importance of Skills

2. Rank Order - Use of Skills

3. Rank Order - Priority of Need

4. Rank Order - Top and Bottom Variables

I. Abstract:

In teaching adult students, one must recognize the extent of individual differences to be encountered. To provide effective instruction, whether individual, small, or large group, it is essential to know what skills students possess and which they lack. It is equally important to understand the attitudes students have toward the knowledge and skills to be mastered. Thus, for the teacher, the administration of an attitude inventory and needs assessment instrument should occur prior to instruction in order to serve as diagnostic tools.

However, for the student the experience of answering questions or responding to items actually begins the total learning cycle. By exposing the student to various topics or concepts, the teacher enables the student to analyze his own background, to express his needs, to react to the present learning environment. Items can be motivating in that they interest the student in what is to come. They resemble advanced organizers by providing a frame of references, relating the known to the unknown.

This paper will give examples of a newly developed attitude inventory and a needs assessment instrument. The relationship between the results of these, based on a pilot study, and the establishment of an appropriate learning environment will be explored. The value of these to the teacher will be shown in terms of the teacher's ability to modify processes and materials to suit the adult student.

Purposes:

The purposes of the study are the following:

1) To design and pilot an attitude inventory and a needs-assessment instrument for use in teaching literacy skills to adult students (see Appendices).
2) To compare expressed attitudes and habits with perceived behaviour and deficiencies.
3) To analyze different responses on the basis of age, sex, academic training, and major teaching area.
4) To hypothesize appropriate kinds of materials, teaching techniques, and learning environments.

II. Review of the Literature

Recent research on adult learners and reading tends to emphasize one of the following: habits, attitudes, skills, materials or instructional techniques. Sometimes more than one area is covered, such as skills taught effectively by a particular method. However, for present purposes, studies will be considered as discrete whenever possible.

Although the largest number of studies relate to skills of college level or adult learners, some focus on other aspects of the reading process, such as habits. One of the numerous studies on newspapers considers population differences in reading for information with age being the critical variable (Robinson, 1978). Reading habits of college students are examined in a Wisconsin article (Taylor, 1978). In an Arizona study, comparison of junior high school, college and adult population groups focused on habits in reading for information (Anders and Cardell, 1977).

Concerning attitudes toward reading, a recent dissertation related attitudes and other factors to reading achievement (Combs, 1977).

An excellent thirty item ERIC Annotated Bibliography on Measuring Attitudes Toward Reading (Hahn, 1977) is a good supplement to Attitudes and Reading (Alexander and Filler, 1976).

Instructional techniques and materials for adult readers were described in articles which favor individualized instruction (Cooke and Farrow, 1975), warn against programmed reading materials (Lumsden, 1975), confirm that the readability of materials needed for functional literacy is too high for the average adult (Folk, 1979), emphasize the importance of directions and questions accompanying textual materials (Blachowicz, 1978) and point out that reading tasks should be life-related and integrated with oral and written skills (Carver, 1978).

The quantity and variety of studies on reading skills is too great to mention all. These range from an examination of reading strategies employed by non-proficient adult college students (Raisner, 1978), to a report of a reading/study skills course at the college level which led to improvements in rate and comprehension (Parker and Argenti, 1977). A British Study developed systems for students to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses (Augstein, 1976) while in the United States, researchers stressed the value of building on students' strengths (Nieratka and Peachy, 1975). For marginally literate adults, the importance of auding prior to reading was documented (Stricht et al, 1978).

A Participation - Reading program to develop skills was suggested (Lopes-Correa, 1976) as well as a sequential, individualized approach to teaching subskills of rate and comprehension (Carpenter and Jones, 1975). Skimming and scanning were taught to college students (Sherer, 1975) and literal comprehension, interpretation and vocabulary development, study of reference skills, and application of skills ~~was~~ taught to college students with the awareness of the differences between adult and student learners (A Course for the Teaching of Community College Reading Skills, 1978).

III. Methodology:

A. Subjects

Fifty-five regular and diploma students in fifth year education from the University of Victoria participated in the study.

B. Procedures

1. Fifty-five students in fifth year education at the University of Victoria served as subjects in a pilot test in mid-October.
2. Results from the newly-developed instruments - a semantic-differential on attitudes to reading and a needs assessment of reading skills - were coded, key-punched and analyzed with computer assistance.
3. Comparisons were made between the results from the two instruments using demographic information obtained from the subjects.
4. Programs Used For Analysis

(SPSS)

Frequencies - Were used on all data.

Cross Tabulation - Was used with Demographic Data, and Importance, Use and Priority of Skills.

Pearson Correlation - Compared Importance, Use and Priority of Skills with each other.

Canonical Correlation - Compared Use of Skills with Attitudes.

IV. Results:

General

1. No relationship between attitudes and skills was found.
2. No relationship between demographic data and attitudes was found.
3. Significantly different responses to skills were made by Bachelor of Education students as opposed to students from other faculties. There is a direct correlation between the program and the year (B.Ed. = 5, other = unclassified).
4. Significantly different responses to skills were made by Physical Education students as opposed to those with other majors.
5. No significantly different responses were made by those of different sex or age.

A. Demographic data

Of the fifty-five students in the sample, twenty-six were enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program (also classified as fifth year) while twenty-nine were taking one year of education after a Bachelors Degree in another area(science, arts, fine arts). These latter are unclassified as professional year students. The subject areas or teaching majors of the sample were: English - 10, Social Studies - 10, Fine Arts - 13, Physical Education - 17, Science - 5. Forty of the students ranged between 20 and 24, fifteen between 25 and 34. Thirty-three were males, twenty-two females.

B. Needs - assessment of reading skills

Results were compared by skill and by column (Importance of Skills, Use of Skills, Priority of Need). Those skills which contained significant responses over columns were: phonics, structural analysis, context clues, dictionary, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, evaluative comprehension,

B. Needs-assessment of reading skills (Cont.)

critical reading, creative reading, note-taking from reading, study habits, use of library, use of textbooks, reading at different rates, selection of materials for study, selection of materials for enjoyment, determining difficulty of material, special skills, communicating material read.

Comparisons of skills within columns produced the following top five ranking of skills:

Column 1 - Literal comprehension, Communication of readings, Use of library, Study habits, Selection of study material.

Column 2 - Note-taking from lectures, Use of library, literal comprehension, Communication of reading, Study habits.

Column 3 - Communication of reading, Evaluative comprehension, critical reading, Study habits, Selection of study materials.

Table 1 Importance of Skills

Table 2 Use of Skills — See Appendices for complete tables

Table 3 Priority of Needs

Overall rankings produced the following results: of the top 20, nine related to Importance of skills, eleven to Use of skills with a high degree of correspondence between them. Of the bottom 20, sixteen related to Priority of need, two to Importance of skills, two to Use of skills (with correspondence between the latter two). Thus, little need for assistance was perceived for the great majority of the skills. See Appendices for table 4.

Skills perceived as important, used, and needed:

phonics, structural analysis, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, determining materials' difficulty, special skills.

Skills perceived as important and used:

context clues, dictionary, evaluative comprehension, critical

B. Needs-assessment of reading skills (Cont.)

reading, creative reading, note-taking lectures, note-taking reading, study habits, use of library, use of textbooks, reading at different rates, selecting enjoyable material, communicating readings.

Skills perceived as used and needed:

selection of study materials.

C. Semantic-Differential Attitude Inventory

Concepts were ranked by means as follows:

1. Value of reading
2. Reading and me
3. Interest in reading
4. Reading for pleasure
5. Reading for information
6. Reading skills
7. Book length
8. Difficulty in reading
9. Time for reading
10. Cost of books

A random sample of subjects was used to compare means with demographic data. No significant differences appeared.

D. Comparison between and within instruments

No significant correlations were found between the attitude inventory concepts and the skills or the demographic data. However, two variables in the demographic data indicated significant differences in the skills. Program (B.Ed. or other) was important in that B.Ed. students perceived a need for assistance in developing the following skills: phonics, note-taking from lectures, note-taking from reading, study habits, use of textbooks, selection of study materials, and

D. Comparison between and within instruments (Cont.)

communicating material read. Similarly, Physical Education majors (who are also a large segment of the B.Ed. group) perceived a need for assistance in developing the following skills: phonics, structural analysis, context clues, creative reading, use of textbooks, and selection of study materials.

V. Implications of the Study:

Implications for Refinement

1/ Semantic Differential for Attitudes to Reading

1. Lack of face validity is an initial problem.
2. It is important to read instructions orally.
3. Even with reversed polarities, response sets were evident. Initial explanation of the instrument might prevent this.
4. Different concepts should be substituted for those producing many neutral responses.

2/ Needs assessment for Reading Skills

1. Instructions - it was important to emphasize that the responses were their own, not their perception of others.
2. Demographic information - a need to be more explicit in #2 and 3 was evident (e.g. Program of studies prior to this year in what faculty, Unclassified - having a degree from another faculty).
3. Skills - some needed definition, e.g. 2,3,6,9. In a revised version, almost all would be defined.
4. Spacing on skills section - too small, making it difficult to code.
5. Additional skills - skimming, scanning.

Implications for Teaching

1/ Instructional strategies

Because the sample used in the pilot of the instruments was very homogeneous, less variation in the results

1/ Instructional Strategies (Cont.)

occurred than one would expect with either high school students or college students. The latter group would vary more in age, and have less uniformity of background. However, even with the tested sample certain differences were evident which would support the need for individualized instruction, at least by subgroups. Even though the sample represents an academically competent group, they perceived need for instruction on the following topics: phonics, structural analysis, literal and inferential comprehension, determining materials' difficulty, special skills, and selection of study materials. By analyzing strengths and weaknesses of students, a peer tutoring system could be introduced pairing a competent with a less competent student for focus on a specific skill. It would seem desirable to pair students from different content areas or different subject majors.

The attitudes to reading expressed by this sample were uniformly positive, a situation which one could not expect with other populations. Therefore, it would seem important for the instructor to serve as a role model in emphasizing the value and importance of reading. U.S.S.R. would be a potentially useful technique. The concern expressed in the responses to Communicating Material Read suggests the need for an integrated approach to communication skills, with listening and speaking serving an important function. U.S.S.W. (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Writing) has proven to be a positive experience in encouraging students'

1/ Instructional Strategies (Cont.)

independence and building their self-confidence.

2/ Learning Environment

Many of the skills needed by students in the sample lend themselves to practical exercises (e.g. word attack, readability formulas and cloze exercises, study techniques such as SQ3R, and designing and answering questions at different levels of comprehension). These should be learned in a relaxed, secure atmosphere where students gain confidence to attempt new tasks. The importance of self-concept to success in reading is widely recognized. Therefore, personal acceptance and positive reinforcement need to be present. Initial success for an individual could derive from the practice of one of the skills he has indicated he uses almost always (Column 2) and does not need help in (Column 3). The setting of the class should include as many types of media equipment as possible, building on students' skills in listening, learning from visual presentations, and manipulating real objects or situations.

3/ Materials

Obviously these three subsections are inter-related. A wide variety of reading materials is essential, for reading for enjoyment and study. Books need to be at different levels of readability (high interest-low vocabulary books for some students). They must be books based on real life problems or situations, or directly related to the academic pursuits of the students. Although it is likely that the instructor will have a bias toward

producing readers who can and do read a range of materials, the adult learner must be given the opportunity and responsibility of setting his own purpose and goals. His reasons for learning to read efficiently may be highly specialized. Always the differences between children and adult learners must be kept in mind.

In conclusion, the pilot study of the two instruments was effective in producing usable data as well as in suggesting refinements. Although the attitude inventory did not produce results which were differentiated enough to be useful, it did indicate a generally positive attitude to the concepts contained. The needs assessment instrument, on the other hand, provided useful demographic data and responses to skills. Information on the status of the sample was derived which suggested factors to be considered in teaching the adult student. Refinements to the instrument could result in more specific data, such as preferred learning styles. The findings of the study were not intended to be generalized because of the limited sample size. However, a better understanding of the factors to modify in the instruments occurred. But more importantly, the characteristics of the adult learner and his difference from the child became clear, enabling the instructor to hypothesize on elements of a positive learning situation for the teaching of literacy skills.

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Appendices

Table 1

RANK ORDER

IMPORTANCE OF SKILLS

VARIABLE	NAME	MEAN
Q51	Literal comprehension	1.709
Q201	Communication of readings	1.800
Q131	Use of library	1.818
Q121	Study habits	1.855
Q161	Selection of study material	1.873
Q71	Evaluative comprehension	1.982
Q61	Inferential comprehension	2.055
Q81	Critical reading	2.127
Q41	Use of dictionary	2.127
Q171	Selection of enjoyment material	2.255
Q141	Use of textbooks	2.309
Q101	Note-taking-lectures	2.327
Q191	Special skills	2.345
Q31	Context clues	2.364
Q91	Creative reading	2.418
Q111	Note-taking-reading	2.473
Q21	Structural analysis	2.600
Q181	Determining material difficulty	2.673
Q151	Reading at different rates	2.909
Q11	Phonics	3.055

Top 5

Table 2

RANK ORDER

USE OF SKILLS

VARIABLE	NAME	MEAN
Q102	Note-taking lectures	1.836
Q132	Use of library	1.964
Q52	Literal comprehension	2.018
Q202	Communication of reading	2.073
Q122	Study habits	2.109
Q142	Use of textbooks	2.109
Q172	Selection of enjoyment material	2.109
Q162	Selection of study material	2.127
Q62	Inferential comprehension	2.182
Q82	Critical reading	2.182
Q42	Use of dictionary	2.236
Q72	Evaluative comprehension	2.255
Q112	Note-taking reading	2.455
Q32	Context clues	2.473
Q92	Creative reading	2.491
Q192	Special skills	2.600
Q182	Determining material difficulty	2.673
Q22	Structural analysis	2.800
Q152	Read at different rates	2.818
Q12	Phonics	3.309

Top 5

Table 3

RANK ORDER

PRIORITY OF NEED

VARIABLE	NAME	MEAN
Q203	Communication of reading	2.400
Q73	Evaluative comprehension	2.509
Q83	Critical reading	2.564
Q123	Study habits	2.782
Q163	Selection of study material	2.800
Q63	Inferential comprehension	2.891
Q133	Use of library	2.927
Q193	Special skills	2.982
Q53	Literal comprehension	3.055
Q183	Determining material difficulty	3.127
Q23	Structural analysis	3.182
Q33	Context clues	3.218
Q93	Creative reading	3.255
Q153	Reading at different rates	3.291
Q113	Note-taking from readings	3.418
Q143	Use of textbooks	3.436
Q13	Phonics	3.527
Q43	Dictionary Use	3.618
Q103	Note-taking from lectures	3.636
Q173	Selection of enjoyment material	3.673

No high priority needs but all with some need.

Table 4

RANK ORDER

ALL VARIABLES Q11 TO Q203

VARIABLE	NAME	MEAN
Q51	Literal comprehension-Importance of skill	1.709
Q201	Communication of reading-Importance of skill	1.800
Q131	Use of library-Importance of skill	1.818
Q102	Note-taking lectures-Use of skill	1.836
Q121	Study habits-Importance of skill	1.855
Q161	Selection of study material-Importance of skill	1.873
Q132	Use of library-Use of skills	1.964
Q71	Evaluative comprehension-Importance of skills	1.982
Q52	Literal comprehension-Use of skills	2.018
Q61	Inferential comprehension-Importance of skill	2.055
Q202	Communication of reading-Use of skill	2.073
Q122	Study habits-Use of skill	2.109
Q142	Use of textbooks-Use of skill	2.109
Q172	Selection of enjoyment material-Use of skill	2.109
Q162	Selection of study material-Use of skill	2.127
Q81	Critical reading-Importance of skill	2.127
Q41	Use of dictionary-Importance of skill	2.127
Q62	Inferential Comprehension-Use of skills	2.182
Q82	Critical reading-Use of skills	2.182
Q42	Use of dictionary-Use of skills	2.236

Top 20 - 11-Use of skill
(high) 9-Importance of skill

Q163	Selection of study material-Priority of need	2.800
Q152	Read at different rates-Use of skills	2.818
Q63	Inferential comprehension-Priority of need	2.891

. . . 2

Table 4

RANK ORDER

ALL VARIABLES Q11 TO Q203

VARIABLE	NAME	MEAN
Q151	Reading at different rates-Importance of skills	2.909
Q133	Use of library-Priority of need	2.927
Q193	Special skills-Priority of need	2.982
Q11	Phonics-Importance of skills	3.055
Q53	Literal comprehension-Priority of need	3.055
Q183	Determining Material difficulty-Priority of need	3.127
Q23	Structural analysis-Priority of need	3.182
Q33	Context clues-Priority of need	3.218
Q93	Creative reading-Priority of need	3.255
Q153	Reading at different rates-Priority of need	3.291
Q12	Phonics-Use of skills	3.309
Q113	Note-taking from readings-Priority of need	3.418
Q145	Use of textbooks-Priority of need	3.436
Q13	Phonics-Priority of need	3.527
Q43	Dictionary use-Priority of need	3.618
Q103	Note-taking from lectures-Priority of need	3.636
Q173	Selecting enjoyment material-Priority of need	3.673

Bottom 20 - 16-Priority of need
2-Importance of skill
2-Use of skill

Needs - Assessment Instrument

SECTION ONE

Please complete the following:

1. Present position

   A. Full-time student ____ B. Part-time student ____

   C. Other ____

2. Program of studies (B.A., B.Sc., B.Ed.)

   A. Arts ____ B. Science ____

   C. Education ____ D. Other ____

3. Year

   A. 1 - 2 ____ B. 3 - 4 ____

   C. 5 ____ D. Graduate student ____

   E. Unclassified ____

4. Major _____

5. Age

   A. 20 - 24 ____ C. 35 - 45 ____

   B. 25 - 34 ____ D. Over 45 ____

6. Sex M ____ F ____

Directions for Completing Section Two

Step 1

Please rate each of the skills in Section Two as to how essential they are to you. Use the scale below and place your responses in Column I (Importance of skills).

1. essential
2. important
3. of moderate importance
4. of little importance
5. of no importance

Step 2

Because there may be a difference between what you consider important and what you in practice do, please rate the skills in Section Two on the frequency of use. Place your responses, from the frequency scale below, in Column II (Present Skills Used).

A. Almost always
B. Often
C. Sometimes
D. Rarely
E. Never

Step 3

Finally, to indicate your priorities for assistance in the skills, please rate each skill in Section Two using the scale below. Place your responses in Column III (Priority of Need).

1. high priority
2. important
3. of moderate importance
4. not very important
5. of no importance

SECTION TWO

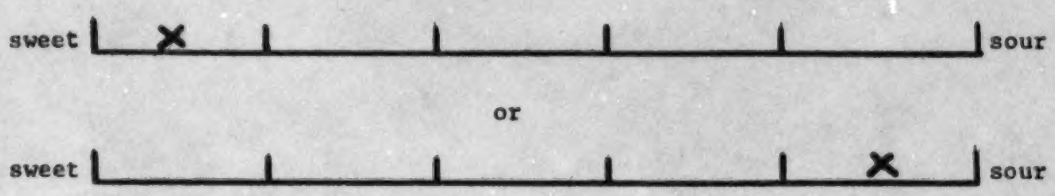
	COLUMN I IMPORTANCE OF SKILLS	COLUMN II PRESENT SKILLS USED	COLUMN III PRIORITY OF NEED
1. Phonics			
2. Structural Analysis			
3. Context Clues			
4. Dictionary			
5. Literal Comprehension			
6. Inferential Comprehension			
7. Evaluative Comprehension			
8. Critical Reading			
9. Creative Reading			
10. Note-taking from Lectures			
11. Note-taking from Reading			
12. Study Habits			
13. Use of Library			
14. Use of Textbooks			
15. Reading at Different Rates			
16. Selection of Materials for study			
17. Selection of materials for enjoyment			
18. Determining Difficulty of Materials			
19. Special Skills for Subjects (e.g. maps/graphs/diagrams.)			
20. Communicating Material Read			

READING ATTITUDES

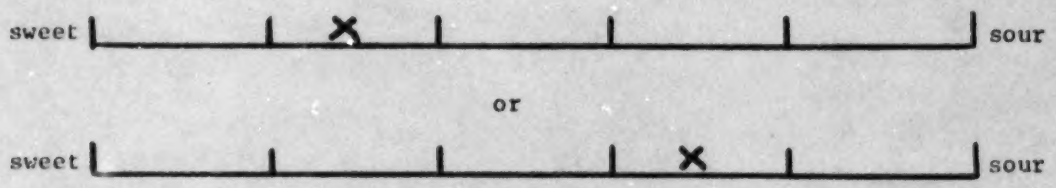
Instructions

The purpose of this study is to measure your attitudes to reading by having you judge concepts on a series of descriptive scales. Do not worry or puzzle over individual items; it is your immediate responses that are wanted. On the other hand, please do not be careless, as a measure of your true impressions is wanted.

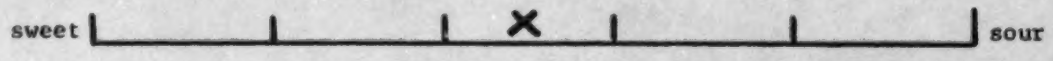
You will be asked to rate each of ten concepts on a set of nine scales. There are five positions on each scale. If you feel that the concept is very closely related to one end of the scale, place your check mark next to the appropriate adjective:



If you feel that the concept is closely related to one or the other end of the scale (but not extremely), place your check mark as follows:

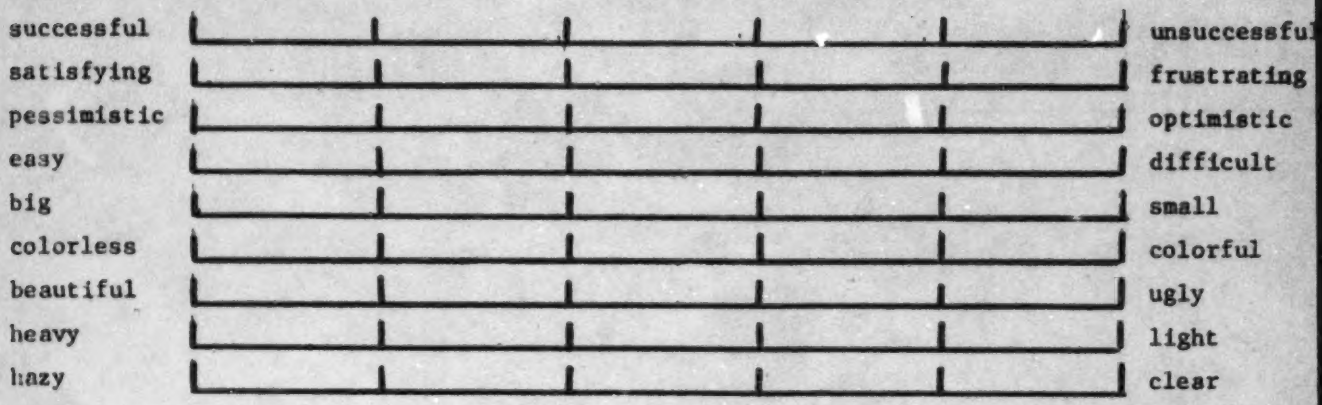


If you consider the concept to be neutral on the scale, or if the scale is completely irrelevant, place your check mark on the centre space.

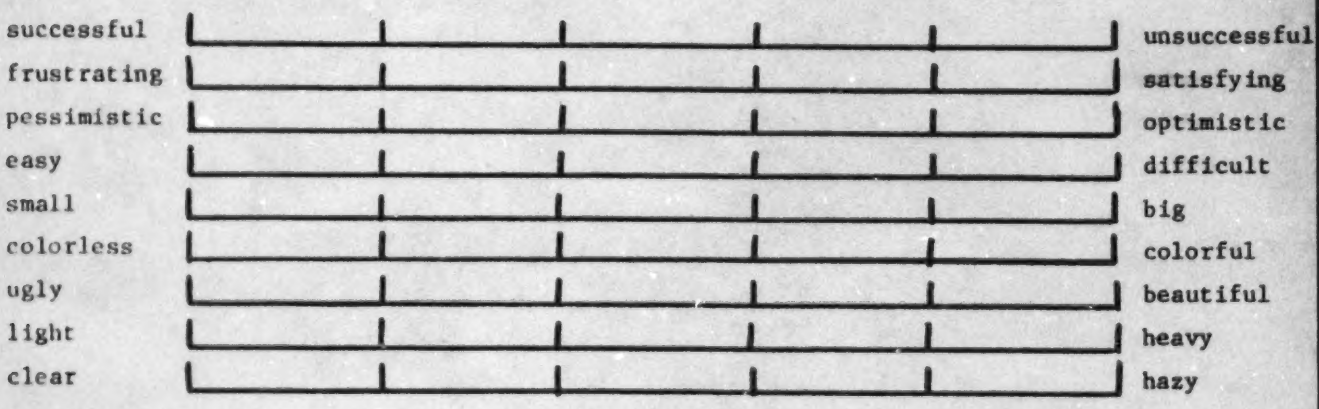


Work at a fairly high speed; remember it is your immediate feelings that are wanted!

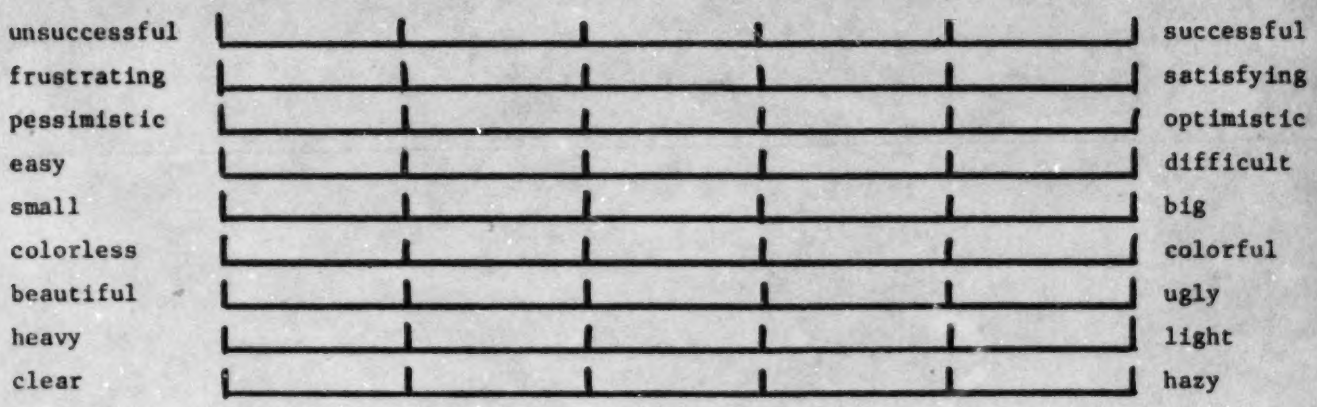
READING FOR INFORMATION



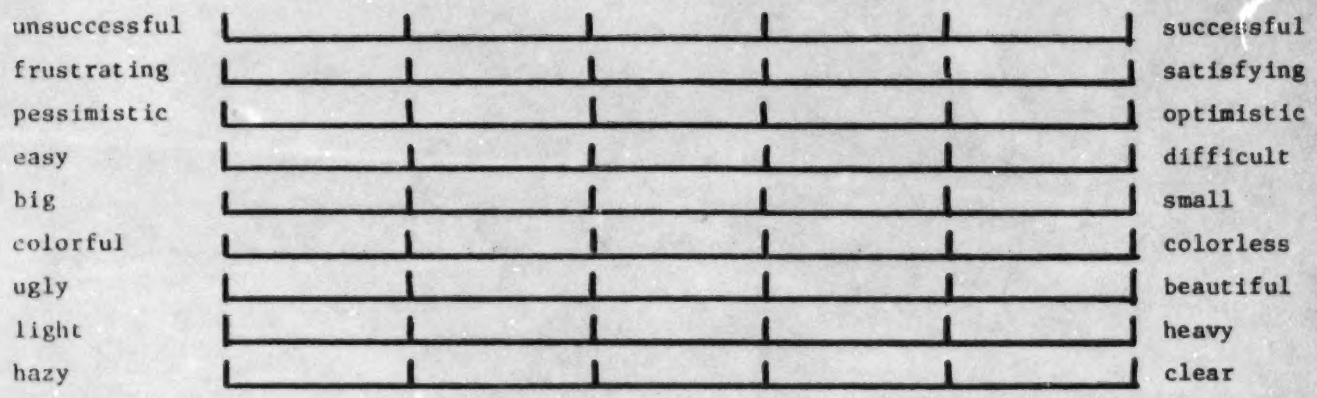
TIME FOR READING



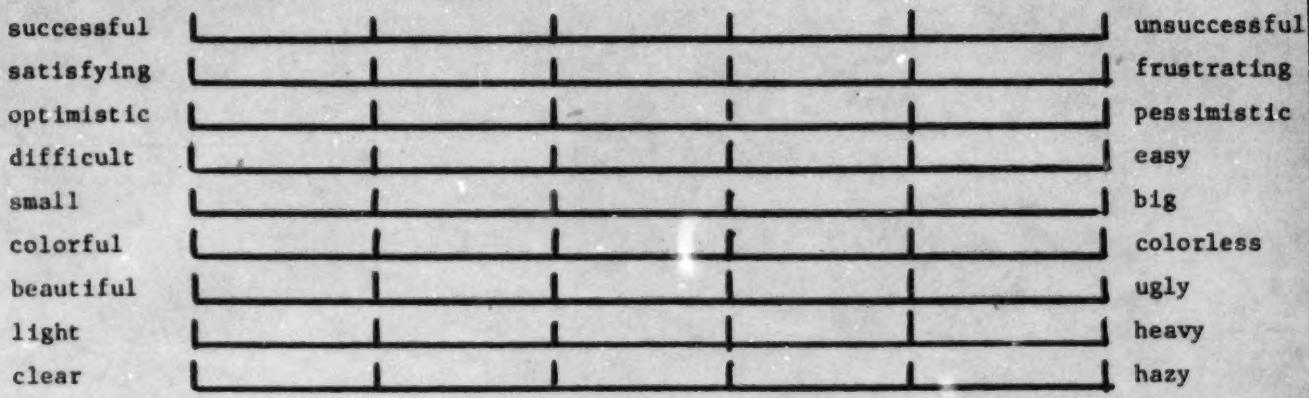
COST OF BOOKS



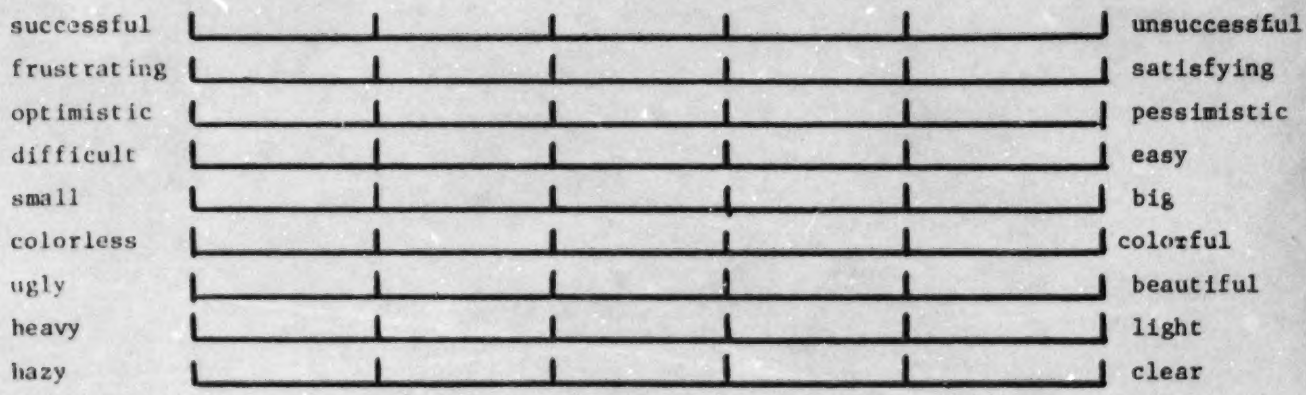
INTEREST IN READING



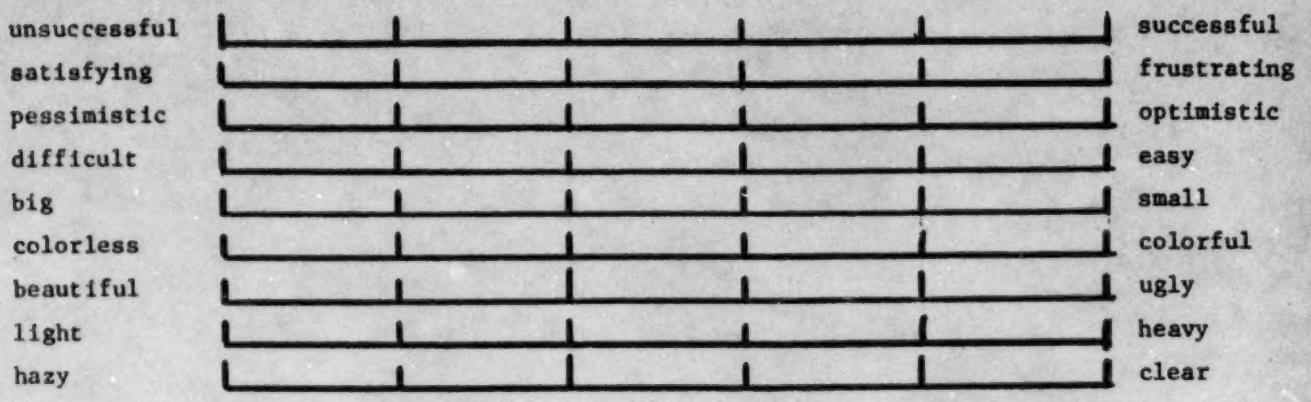
READING FOR PLEASURE



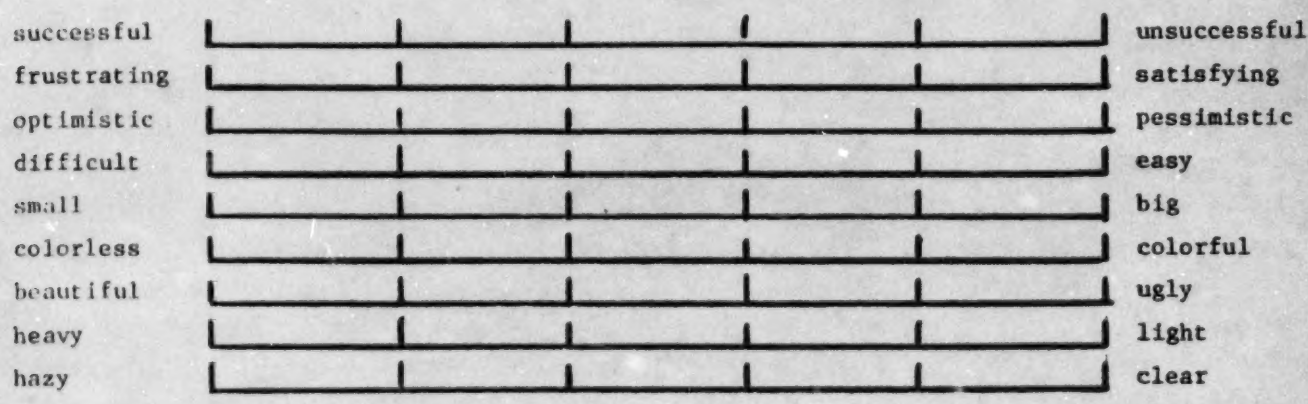
LENGTH OF BOOKS



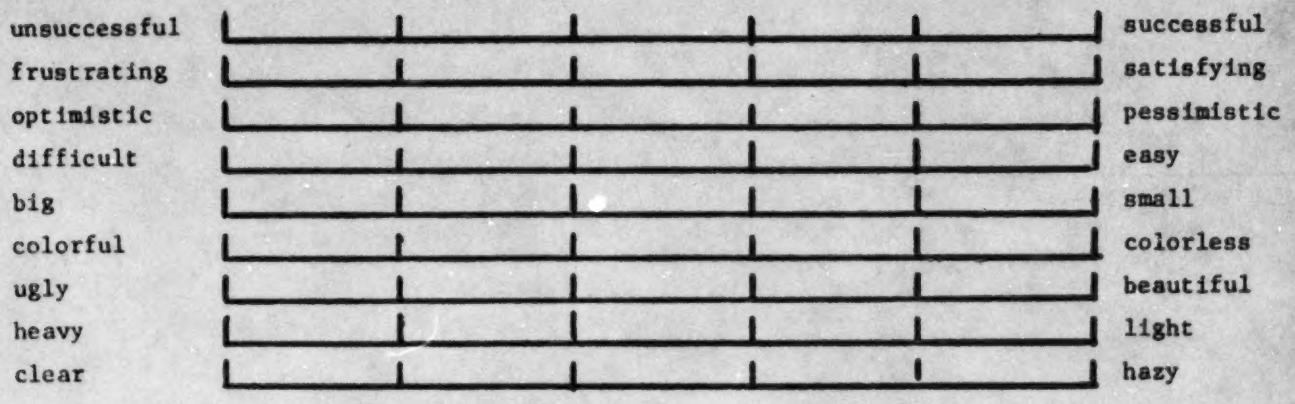
SKILLS FOR READING



VALUE OF READING



DIFFICULTY OF READING



READING AND ME